

How to Succeed With Volunteers-In-Parks

60-Minute Module Series

PROGRAM PLANNING

Training Guide

HANDOUTS

**National Park Service
Volunteers-In-Parks Program**



Guide to Handouts

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Key Concepts of Program Planning

The purpose of program planning is to measure the current status of your VIP program and to chart a park-wide course for the future.

Concept 1

An objective assessment of your current VIP program is the starting point for all of the planning that will follow.

Use the handout “How Close Are You to a Model Volunteer Program” as a reference to see if all the basic elements of a good volunteer program are in place. Identify strengths and weaknesses. See if program is addressing priority needs and if staff resources are being effectively used.

Concept 2

A Mission Statement will create the framework for your VIP program.

Keep the mission statement short and simple so even first time readers can easily understand it. It will explain why your park supports volunteers as full partners in contributing to the park’s mission.

Concept 3

Support from top management and other staff is critical for the ultimate success of your volunteer program.

Get park-wide commitment to your program by involving management as well as other paid staff and volunteers, in defining the major goals to be accomplished within the next five years. Establish accountability in your VIP Program by assigning specific individuals the responsibility for meeting each of your goals.

How Close Are You to a Model Volunteer Program?

Instructions: Rate your volunteer program against each of the components of an ideal Volunteer Program (A = Excellent; B = Good; C Poor). Note methods of improving your ratings in each area.

Component of Ideal Volunteer Program	Rating	Suggestions for Improvement
Strong, positive motivations to have a volunteer program		
Written agency mission statement		
Park partner involvement		
Written policies and procedures for volunteer program		
Volunteers involved in planning and evaluating volunteer program		
Good staff/volunteer relations		
Peer recruitment		
Effective safety training program in place		
Short and long range plan for volunteer program		
Volunteer recruitment plan		
Formal and informal volunteer recognition		

Component of Ideal Volunteer Program	Rating	Suggestions for Improvement
Systematic and regular volunteer performance reviews		
Written job description for all volunteers		
Volunteer record keeping system in place		
Paid volunteer coordinator		
Agency orientation session/manual		
Diversity among agency volunteers		
Strong support/direction of volunteer program by superintendent		
Creative utilization of volunteers		
Staff trained to work with volunteer		
Place for volunteers to work		
Time to supervise volunteers		
Agency has good visibility and reputation		
Adequate training of volunteers provided		
Annual outcomes report prepared for superintendent		

The Benefits of Conducting a Volunteer Program Assessment

Taking the time to go through a formal assessment process may seem an overwhelming task and a questionable use of very limited time. However, performing an assessment maybe the turning point in the development of your park's volunteer program. If we are totally engrossed in the daily pressures of operating a volunteer program, we often lose sight of the larger picture and the problems or resistance which may be dramatically impacting our effectiveness in leading a volunteer program. The National Park Service is clearly committed to our Volunteers-In-Parks Program. We must also be committed to excellence in managing our VIP program.

Among its many benefits, a good assessment will assist you in:

1. Identifying your program's strengths/weaknesses
2. Anticipating or explaining problems within the program
3. Improving the morale and involvement of volunteers and staff
4. Discovering which staff or assignments have the highest volunteer turnover
5. Uncovering what new or enhanced services are directly or indirectly related to volunteer work
6. Lay the ground work for planning

Volunteer Program Assessment: Five Essential Components

A simple numbers game (i.e. how many volunteers enrolled and how many hours of service they gave) does not give the full picture of what was truly accomplished, the quality of that work, and how the organization benefited from volunteer efforts. It is, therefore, recommended that each park annually or biannually engage in a program assessment. Depending on the size of your park, you may want to design the assessment on a formal basis with written questionnaires and assessment forms or on a more informal basis through focus groups, interviews, etc. Either way, it is recommended that you gather the following information:

Essential components of a volunteer program

1. Annual assessment of program goals
2. Demographic picture of our volunteers
3. Assessment of volunteer program by: paid staff and volunteers
4. Assessment of administrative support
5. Overall park program assessment (i.e., How close are you to a model volunteer program?)

Developing a Mission Statement for Your Volunteer Program

Definition: A mission statement identifies the main business and philosophy of the organization. Mission statements focus on the following:

- Resource
- Visitors
- Volunteers

Having a written mission statement as to why your park wishes to utilize the Volunteers-In-Parks program will have an impact in the following ways:

It will impact the types of jobs your park will develop for volunteer opportunities.

It will enable your park to explain to volunteers how and why they are contributing to the NPS Mission.

It will assist in establishing clear relationships between your volunteers and paid staff.

The statement becomes the basis upon which you can then develop policies and other decisions affecting volunteers in your park.

Volunteering provides an opportunity for the local and international community to participate directly in the operation and management of national parks.

Volunteers bring numerous linkages to groups in which they are involved, thus potentially opening the doors considerably wider into the community.

It is often easier to experiment with new ideas and approaches not yet funded through volunteer help.

As you develop your mission statement, see how the choice of such words as supplement, enhance, innovate, develop teams, etc. tell a great deal about how volunteers are regarded and utilized within your park.

What's in it for the Superintendent?

A well-managed VIP Program:

- Supports GPRA (Government Performance Results Act) goals
- Targets management objectives
- Develops NPS constituency
- Helps connect parks to citizens/communities
- Encourages better utilization of paid staff
- Extends ability of staff to get priority work done
- Makes better use of taxpayer dollars
- Increases “bragging rights”

As You Complete Your Volunteer Time With Us... We Need Your Feedback

Thank you for volunteering for the National Park Service. Your feedback and advice will help us maintain the best possible volunteer program. Please complete this evaluation form and return it to the Volunteer Coordinator. We welcome any additional comments or suggestions you may have about the VIP program.

1. Did you feel you, had enough input regarding your job selection and placement?
2. Was your job description accurate/adequate?
3. Did you receive an appropriate orientation to the, park, the park staff and the National Park Service?
4. Did you receive adequate training, if needed, to do the job? Did you receive safety training?
5. Did you feel the job utilized your talents and satisfied your reasons for choosing to volunteer?

6. Did people in this organization acknowledge and appreciate your volunteer contributions?
7. Did you feel adequate supervision and direction to do your job?
8. Was your time as a volunteer a worthwhile experience for you?
9. What suggestions do you have for improving the VIP program?

Park Name _____

Name (optional) _____

Characteristics of Commitment to Highly Effective VIP Programs

1. The mission of the National Park Service and the significance of the park are clear to all volunteers.
2. The role of volunteers in the park is viewed as a positive extension of paid staff and volunteers are seen as valuable human resources.
3. Management at all levels in the park make a concerted effort to promote and facilitate volunteer involvement.
4. There is a clear focal point of leadership and support in managing volunteers in the park.
5. Paid staff and volunteers work effectively together toward common goals.
6. All volunteers have signed agreement forms and written job descriptions and are evaluated on the performance of their duties.
7. Significant volunteer contributions are celebrated with both the paid and volunteer staff.
8. There is a conscious effort to represent diversity in the park's volunteer work force.
9. All volunteers are given an orientation to the park, park staff, and their job, as well as adequate training, including safety training, to accomplish their work.
10. The park has a volunteer handbook that includes all park-wide policies that relate to volunteers and to the volunteer program.
11. Volunteer jobs clearly address priority work in the park.

Symptom of Paid Staff Resistance

The following observations may be related to paid staff resistance:

- high turnover in volunteers
- few volunteers in park or in some districts/division
- volunteers “look” like staff (no diversity)
- references like “your volunteer program” or “your volunteers” instead of “our”
- many reasons to keep volunteers out
- lack of rewards for staff who use volunteers well
- no training in volunteer management
- no training in supervision for supervisors of volunteers
- management not using volunteers
- many staff choosing not to use volunteers
- work space not adequate for volunteers
- volunteer manager position is low level and poorly paid
- volunteers given mostly menial jobs

Do you notice any of these in your organizations?

When paid staff members are given an opportunity to express their feelings, they give many reasons for their lack of receptiveness to volunteers. Some are:

- fear of job replacement
- loss of control (volunteers may not do the job well)
- lack of involvement in the planning of the volunteer program
- no way to dismiss a volunteer who is not working out well
- lack of involvement in the planning of the volunteer program
- lack of clarity in paid staff and volunteer jobs
- volunteers take too much time
- no rewards for doing the job well
- volunteering is not a priority for the superintendent
- no skills to supervise volunteers
- no quality control on volunteers brought into the Park
- volunteers are too needy, take up personal time
- bad former experiences with volunteers
- others?

Methods of Promoting Good Volunteer/Staff Relations

1. Make certain there are clear written policies regarding volunteers - policies that endorse their involvement and delineate their roles and relationships with paid staff.
2. Plan with staff for the involvement of volunteers, not for them. Start small, taking care to select the best candidates available.
3. Plan common experiences for the staff and volunteers (i.e., staff meetings, social occasions, etc.) so that they will get to know one another better.
4. Have written job descriptions for volunteers that outline work to be done, reporting relationships, schedules, expectations. Make certain that both the volunteer and supervising staff member have a copy of it. It should be reviewed and may be modified as they begin to work together.
5. Allow staff to have the final say on the jobs they want the volunteers to perform, skills needed to do those jobs, and the final selection of the volunteer.
6. Orient all staff to volunteers and volunteerism. Help them understand the types of people who volunteer, their diverse motivations, range of skills, abilities, interests and needs. Let them voice their fears and reservations. Take their concerns seriously.
7. Hold an annual assessment of the volunteer program, getting input from the staff, volunteers and administration.
8. Encourage organizational recognition be given to staff people who have worked effectively with volunteers.
9. Ensure that volunteers have, or develop, the skills needed to do the job. Require training, if necessary.
10. Orient and train volunteers to what paid staff do, their skills, training, motivations, needs, and pressures.
11. Provide joint recognition of the volunteers and staff (Support the notion that, as a team, they accomplished many things.).
12. Maintain supportive relationships with all staff and teach them to trust that you're looking out for their interests. Learn to mediate without taking sides. Be a "win - win" person.
13. Let your enthusiasm, personal commitment and energy be contagious: about volunteers, about the program, about the good work paid staff do. Be a continuous promoter.
14. Keep yourself and your volunteers focused on the mission, purpose and the values of the program. "Keep the dream alive."